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ABSTRACT

Semantic differential statements were used to elicit attitudes toward aging from 176 high school students, college students, and older adults (nonstudents) who had viewed four sketches of a white male's appearance at ages 12, 19, 49, and 70 years. The results were the following: (1) High school students described aging as more personally unacceptable, less autonomous, and more ineffective than did nonstudents. (2) The picture of the 49-year-old man was described as less personally acceptable than the other pictures, while the picture of the 70-year-old man was seen as less autonomous than the picture of the 12 year old. (3) The picture of the 19-year-old man was described as more personally unacceptable by high school and college students than by nonstudents. (4) The picture of the 49-year-old man was seen as more personally unacceptable by high school respondents than by older adult respondents. (5) The picture of the 70-year-old man was seen as less personally unacceptable by high school and college respondents than by nonstudents. (6) The pictures of the 12-year-old and the 19-year-old subjects were considered more ineffective by the high school respondents than by the nonstudent respondents. (RL)

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THE EFFECTS OF AGING ON ATTITUDE AND COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR: A LIFE SPAN PERSPECTIVE

Paper presented at the annual convention of
The Speech Communication Association in New York
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Introduction

Throughout history, the aged have been characterized by an array of negative attitudes. In his Rhetoric, Aristotle described those advanced in years as indecisive and unsure of everything with a definite decline in mentality (1389 11-1390 a27). In the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III described old men as: "easily provoked, stingy and avaricious, sullen and quarrelsome, quick to talk, slow to hear, but not slow in wrath, praising former times, despising the modern, censuring the present, commending the past" (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1977, p. 39). Finally, Shakespeare and his contemporaries presented a bleak picture of older people. They were seen as those who: "deteriorate in physical prowess. And most notably, besides loss of teeth, offensive odor, running nose and eyes, these old people show a dulling of mental powers" (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1977, p. 39).

In modern society, a prevalance of negative attitudes toward the aged still exists. The persistence of these negative attitudes has led researchers to investigate the stereotypes assigned to the aged and the perceived notions which different age groups have toward one another. The general purpose of this study is to further explore the attitudes of some age groups toward other age groups and the implications these attitudes have for communication behavior.

Review of the Literature

The whole American socialization process works against the aging process in the most potent and insidious way. For the individual's age stereotype pervades his/her child, adolescent, young adult and adult worlds. It is not until old age faces one first-hand that the individual thinks to challenge the myths of ageism; but, all-too-often, by this time the myths have jelled

into beliefs and attitudes resulting in prescriptive behaviors (Tuckman & Lorge, 1954).

Studies have consistently indicated the presence of a stereotyped perception of people over 65, not only on the part of younger age groups, but on the part of the aged themselves (Tuckman & Lorge, 1954; Kogan, 1961; Kogan & Shelton, 1962; Kaplan & Pokorny, 1970; Preston, 1975; Harris, 1975). These stereotypes relate to such areas as happiness, productivity, aggressiveness, sexuality, independence, intelligence, cooperativeness, and so on. Other studies have provided evidence that contradicts the validity of these stereotypes (Riley & Foner, 1965; Riley, Riley & Johnson, 1964; Riley, Johnson & Foner, 1972; Rubin, 1968; Masters & Johnson, 1966).

Research findings have been somewhat contradictory regarding the attitudes held by different age groups toward the aging process (Kastenbaum & Durkee, 1964; Hickey & Kalish, 1968; Weinberger & Millham, 1975; Cameron, 1972; Borges & Dutton, 1976; Ivester & King, 1976; Thomas & Yamamoto, 1975; Lange, 1964). These apparent inconsistencies in the literature may, in part, be explained by the differences in instrumentation, respondent age, target age and presentation mode of the target employed by researchers.

McTavish (1971) reports several instruments that have been used to gather data from individuals in regard to attitudes toward aging. A Likert-type scale of attitudes toward the elderly has been employed by Axelrod & Eisdorfer (1961), Drake (1957), Eisdorfer (1966), Hickey & Kalish (1968), McTavish (1970), and Tuckman & Lorge (1953). A content analysis approach was employed by Britton & Britton (1970), Cabot (1961), Coe (1967), Neugarten & Gutmann (1958), and McTavish (1970). Others have relied upon the semantic

differential technique (Eisdorfer & Altrocchi, 1961; Kogan & Wallach, 1961; Knapp & Moss, 1963; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969; and O'Connell & Rotter, 1979).

Rosencranz & McNevin (1969) have developed a 32-item semantic differential scale in which they asked subjects to rate each of three age categories (20-30, 40-55, 70-85). A factor analysis yielded three major dimensions--"Instrumental-Ineffective," "Autonomous-Dependent," and "Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability." These authors depicted instrumentality as adaptability, ability to pursue goals, and being in the center of activity. One who was considered autonomous was portrayed as one contributing to his social system more than he receives in terms of personal maintenance. Personal acceptability was characterized as ease in social milieus and maintanance of considerable social interactions. This instrument has been employed by others with promising results (O'Connell & Rotter, 1979). Rosencranz & McNevinhave urged researchers to administer their validated and reliable semantic differential to groups of respondents representing the entire life cycle.

This call for a broad spectrum of life-cycle sampling has been largely unheeded. Researchers have, on occasion, employed older people in various settings as subjects for studies (Kahana & Coe, 1969; Kogan, 1961; Kogan & Shelton, 1962; Kogan and Wallach, 1961; and Smith, 1966), but the use of college students as subjects in gerontology studies typifies the prevailing mode (Tuckman & Lorge, 1952; Aaronson, 1966; Axelrod & Eisdorfer, 1961; Bekker & Taylor, 1966; Brockman, 1969; Britton & Britton, 1970; Drake, 1957; Lane, 1964; McTavish, 1971; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969; Rubin & Brown, 1975; and O'Connell & Rotter, 1979).

Past research has relied primarily on one subject group (college age), yet representative stimulus ages across the life span have been frequently

employed. Weinberger & Millham (1975) asked subjects to respond attitudinally to two abstract target ages: 25 and 70-year olds. O'Connell & Rotter (1979) used three stimulus ages: 25, 50, and 75-years old. Rosencranz & McNevin (1969) asked subjects to evaluate age ranges of 20-30, 40-55, and 70-85. The results of these studies would be more comparable if the target ages employed were standardized.

Inconsistencies in the findings of attitudes toward aging may also be due to the manner in which the target age stimuli were presented. All of the target ages mentioned above were abstract. That is, subjects were asked to picture in their minds a person of a particular age. Even though studies employing the abstract target ages reported differences among attitudes toward aging, there was no concrete way of discerning whether the responses given by subjects were based solely on age or other confounding factors. In other words, each subject pictured a unique image based on experiences which may not have been like those of other subjects.

To obtain a more precise evaluation of the target ages, photographs of people representing different target ages have been used with success by Britton & Britton (1969, 1970), Neugarten & Gutmann (1958) and Thomas & Yamamoto (1975).

Rubin & Brown (1975) used sketches of target ages representing the life span. The target groups included preadolescent, adolescent, teenage, young, middle-aged and old adult. In two experiments these target ages were used to determine (1) how college students perceived the intellectual skills of other age groups, and (2) whether or not college students would behave in a manner consistent with beliefs about other age groups.

In the first experiment, the authors devised a questionnaire and asked subjects to rate the target age's ability to perform the following tasks: (1) the ability to classify a picture of an adult male into five separate role categories; (2) the ability to understand that the amount of water poured from a short, wide glass into a tall, narrow glass is the same amount; (3) the ability to read a map; (4) the ability to solve a 100-piece puzzle; (5) the ability to solve a 3-digit, long division problem; (6) the ability to live independently; and (7) the ability to discuss a moral issue.

The respondents perceived the elderly adults as less intellectually competent than either young or middle-aged adults. These results lend support to the findings of other investigators "that perceptions of the elderly are less positive; both in terms of personality and intellectual traits than those of younger adults" (Bengston, 1971; Cameron, 1970).

The second experiment tested the "relationship of person perception and action. In other words, this experiment was designed to discover whether or not college students would communicate differently to various persons based on their ages" (p. 464) in a manner consistent with the attitudes discovered in the first experiment. Thirty males and 30 females were randomly selected from the first group of subjects. Twelve out of the 30 were asked to communicate rules of a game to a variety of age groups of both sexes. The "listeners" were represented by twelve black-and-white ink drawings designating six different age levels. The picture-portrayed age levels were identical to those employed as target populations in the first experiment, with exclusion of the infant. Figures were drawn full-length, face-on with neutral expressions.

The rules of the game to be communicated were as follows: "Communicate rules and objectives of the game to this person (presenting a picture of a

same-sexed listener to the subject). He/she is X-years old, non-institutionalized, middle class, and of average intelligence" (p. 465).

The researchers tape recorded all subject responses and then transcribed each situation. "The dependent measure included: (1) number of words per utterance (a greater number of words reflecting greater complexity); (2) number of utterances; (3) number of sentences; and (4) number of game rules cited" (p. 465).

The only dependent measure of the four which showed any statistical significance, was number of words per utterance. This measure was the only communication variable to correlate positively and significantly with the average scores obtained from the questionnaire used in the first experiment ($r=.47$, $n=60$, $p<.001$). The authors concluded that "this technique seems reasonable for comparing communications to different age targets, and in this experiment, revealed a curvilinear age trend whereby middle-aged listeners received significantly more words per utterance than either the preschool, preadolescent, or elderly adult listeners" (p. 466).

Overall, the Rubin & Brown study seemed to support the contention "that people will behave in accordance with their stereotyped perceptions of others" (Tagiuri, 1969). In this study, "young adults perceived their peers and adults of their parent's generation to be more intelligent in a variety of cognitive areas than were infants, preschoolers, preadolescents, and elderly persons. Moreover, middle-aged adults received more words per utterance than did the child or the elderly listener. Therefore, evidence now exists to indicate that "a relationship should exist between subject's person perceptions and their behavior toward those perceived" (p. 466).

Finally, this study also supported the contention that "effective communication involves the speaker's ability to discriminate the attributes of the listener and to recode the informational components to which the speaker believes the listener requires" (Flavell, 1968).

This detailed description of the Rubin & Brown study indicated that the technique of using sketches of people representing specific target ages, does indeed measure changes in attitudes expressed toward various ages. Unfortunately, this study together with the others reviewed, often led the reader to contradictory conclusions. This problem could be eliminated if there were a consensus among researchers to employ standardized approaches toward instrumentation, subject age, target age, and presentation of target-age stimuli. Agreement could easily be made from procedures that have already been used successfully.

Objectives

This study sought to blend those approaches that have already been used with a modicum of success with new approaches designed especially for this study. Specifically, the multi-dimensional semantic differential instrument developed by Rosencranz & McNevin, was administered to subjects representing a variety of ages across the life span. As suggested by Rubin and Brown (1975), a sketch was used to introduce the target age stimulus. The sketch, however, did represent one male at four different ages throughout his life span. This innovation was intended to control for the possibility of subjects responding to confounding target characteristics other than age.

The specific purpose of this study was to answer the following four research questions: (1) Are there any significant differences among

respondent groups in their attitudes toward aging? (2) Are there any significant differences among the attitudes expressed toward various life cycle target ages? (3) Are there any significant differences among respondent age groups in their communication behavior? (4) Are there any significant differences among the communicative behaviors expressed toward various life cycle target ages?

Methodology

Sample

One hundred and seventy-six subjects participated in the study. The subjects were randomly drawn from three different age groups: high school students (100% of whom were age 17 or less), college students in the basic public speaking course at an urban university (91% of whom were age 30 or less), and non-students (93% of whom were age 61 or over).

Design

A 4 x 3 factorial design consisting of four target ages and three respondent age groups was employed. A diagram of the design is shown below along with the number of subjects in each cell.

TABLE 1

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

TARGET AGES

RESPONDENT GROUPS	12 years	19 years	49 years	70 years
High School	n=15	n=15	n=15	n=15
College	n=15	n=14	n=15	n=14
Non-Student	n=15	n=15	n=14	n=14

Materials

A professional artist created four black-and-white sketches which represented development across the life span of a white male. The following target ages were represented: (1) adolescent (12 years old); (2) young adult (19 years old); (3) middle-aged adult (49 years old); and (4) old adult (70 years old).

The ages represented were validated by both students in the field of communication, and professors teaching communication courses. Individuals were asked to assign a specific age to the person pictured. A mean age was then taken from the total ages gathered for each picture. After viewing each picture, several experts in communication unanimously agreed that the sketches represented a single individual as he aged. Using the representative aging of a single person, as opposed to images of various people for different target age groups, represented an important control for this study.

Instrumentation

A semantic differential developed by Rosencranz & McNevin (1969), was used to "measure the valance of stereotypic attitudes and determine the content or dimensions of such attitudes" (p. 55). The instrument contained 32 sets of bipolar adjectives that were broken down into three dimensions: Instrumental-Ineffective (II); Autonomous-Dependent (AD); and Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability (PAU). The instrument contained 9 II, 9 AD and 14 PAU items, respectively.

In the Instrumental-Ineffective dimension, adjective pairs included progressive-old-fashioned, productive-unproductive, busy-idle, and active-passive. "A person scoring high in this dimension would be considered actively pursuing goals, adaptive to change, and suited for "where the action is" (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969, p. 56).

The Autonomous-Dependent dimension included adjective pairs such as independent-dependent, secure-insecure, organized-disorganized, and certain-uncertain. "The person scoring high on this dimension should be viewed as contributing at least as much energy to the functioning of his social system as he derives from others for his personal maintenance" (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969, p. 56).

Finally, the Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability dimension, which included adjective pairs such as friendly-unfriendly, pleasant-unpleasant, happy-sad, and cooperative-uncooperative, described an individual scoring high on this dimension as one "who would have little difficulty in his social milieu. These attributes would seem indispensable to the maintenance of high levels of social interaction" (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969, p. 56).

These dimensions which measure subjects' attitudes toward other age groups were derived from factor analytic procedures. Before arriving at the final semantic differential used in this study, Rosencranz & McNevin (1969), went through extensive pretesting of individual adjective scales. They offer data to support the validity and reliability of the instrument.

In addition to the semantic differential, a questionnaire was used in this study to measure communicative interaction. A set of instructions asked subjects "to pretend that the person in the picture will be visiting you for a weekend. Please write a note to him describing the things he might do during his stay." The procedure parallels that used by Rubin & Brown. A change was made because an instrument was needed that would be conducive to all three groups, allowing more flexibility for the respondents. Nevertheless, both instruments yield similar dependent variables.

Procedure

One of the four sketches was randomly shown to a small group, typically consisting of about fifteen subjects. While viewing the sketch, subjects received the experimental materials which contained instructions on how to complete the semantic differential, and instructions on how to write the note to the male in the picture. The age of the target was casually announced to all Ss and appeared in the materials.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables used include the number of words, number of sentence and phrases, and the semantic differential score totals taken from the three dimensions (II, AD, PAU). A sentence was defined as a group of inter-related words containing a subject and predicate conveying or implying a complete thought ending with appropriate punctuation. A phrase was defined as two or more words (not including its finite verb with its subject) forming a complete unit of thought but lacking complete punctuation.

Results

Results for each question will be discussed separately. Research questions one and two report the findings which point to differences in attitudes toward aging as reflected by the semantic differential dimension scores: Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability, Autonomous-Dependent, and Instrumental-Ineffective. Research findings for questions three and four identify differences in communication behavior as measured by the dependent variables: number of words and number of written sentences and phrases.

Research Question One

A two-way analysis of variance was used to determine whether there were any significant differences among the three respondent age groups in their

attitudes expressed toward aging. The analysis revealed significant main effects for the Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability dimension ($F=6.4$, $df=2/164$, $p=.002$), the Autonomous-Dependent dimension ($F=4.4$, $df=2/164$, $p=.01$), and the Instrumental-Ineffective dimension ($F=9.4$, $df=2/164$, $p=.001$).

Scheffe analysis revealed that for the PAU dimension, high school student respondents ($\bar{X}=58$) were significantly ($p<.05$) different than non-student respondents ($\bar{X}=49$). These results indicate that high school subjects saw the persons represented in the target pictures to be less personally acceptable than the older non-student subjects saw them to be.

Scheffe analysis of the AD dimension revealed again, that high school subjects ($\bar{X}=37$)differed significantly ($p<.05$) from non-students ($\bar{X}-32$). Results indicate that the younger high school students saw the person in the target pictures to be more dependent than the older non-students saw them to be.

Scheffe analysis of the II dimension also revealed that high school subjects ($\bar{X}=37$) differed significantly ($p<.05$) from non-student respondents ($\bar{X}=30$). Results indicate that the high school students saw the person in the target pictures to be less effective than the non-students saw them to be.

The results, then, of the first research question indicate that different respondent age groups do show marked differences in their attitudes toward aging. This supports the finding that younger people tend to view aging more negatively (Ivester, 1976; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969).

Research Question Two

Findings related to research question one found significant differences in attitudes toward aging expressed by the three respondent groups. Research

question two sought to discover if there were any significant differences among the attitudes expressed toward each of the four targets.

A two-way analysis of variance revealed significant main effects for the Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability dimension (F=7.8, df=3/164, p=.001), and the Autonomous-Dependent dimension (F=4.5, df-3/164, p=.004). The dimension, Instrumental-Ineffective, failed to yield significance (F=1.8, df=3/164, p=.14).

Scheffe analysis revealed that for the PAU dimension, the 49-year old ($\bar{X}$=62) differed significantly ($p < .05$) from the 12-year old ($\bar{X}$=52), 70-year old ($\bar{X}$=50.4) and 19-year old ($\bar{X}$=50). These results indicate that the 49-year old was seen by the overall sample to be the most personally unacceptable.

For the dimension AD, a Scheffe test revealed that the 12-year old ($\bar{X}$=38) was significantly ($p < .05$) different from the 70-year old ($\bar{X}$=31). Respondents on this dimension saw the 70-year old to be more dependent than the 12-year old.

Significant two-way interactions (target age by respondent group) were discovered for the PAU dimension (F=5.1, df=6/164, p=.001), the AD dimension (F=2.7, df=6/164, p=.01) and the II dimension (F=2.1, df=6/164, p=.05). Figure 1 illustrates the pattern of attitudes expressed by the three respondent groups toward each of the four life cycle target ages. In order to gain further insight into the essence of the significant main and interaction effects, a series of one-way analyses of variance and Scheffe tests (.05 level of significance) were executed.

Twelve year-old target. On the II scale, the high school age respondents ($\bar{X}$=38) differed significantly (F=4.6, df=2/42, p=.01) from the older non-students ($\bar{X}$=29). High school students saw the youngest life cycle target to

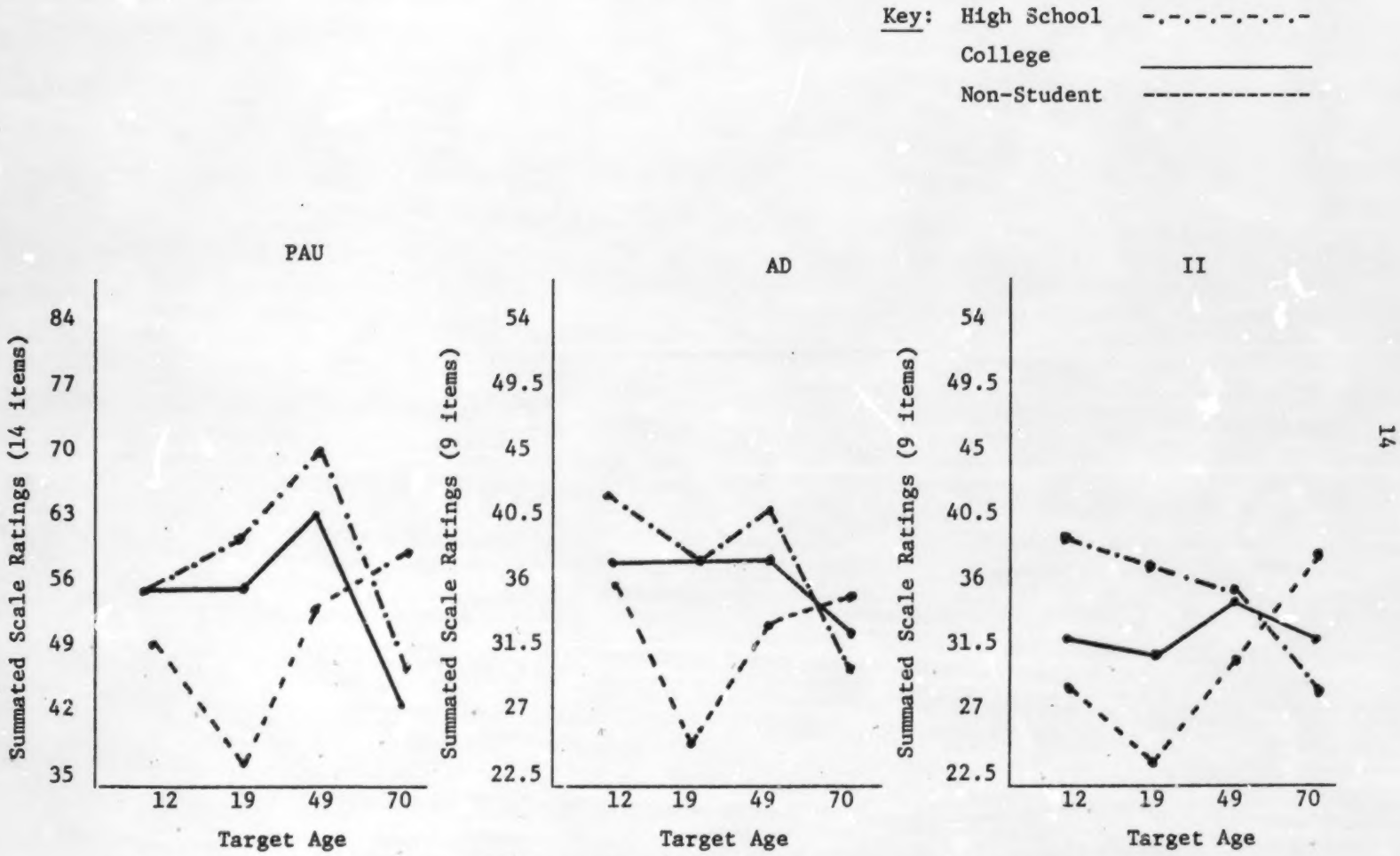

Figure 1. INTERACTION EFFECTS OF TARGET AGE AND RESPONDENT AGE ON THE DIMENSIONS PERSONAL ACCEPTABILITY (PAU), DEPENDENCY (AD), AND EFFECTIVENESS (II).

be more ineffective than the non-students saw him to be. No significant differences among respondent groups were found on the PAU (F=0.9, df=2/42, p=.38) and AD (F=1.0, df=2/42, p=.34) dimensions.

Nineteen-year-old target. Respondents also differed in their attitudes toward the 19-year old target. On the dimension, PAU, non-students ($\bar{X}$=36) differed (F=10.9, df=2/41, p=.001) from both high school students ($\bar{X}$=59) and college age students ($\bar{X}$=54); that is, high school and college respondents saw the 19-year old to be more personally unacceptable than non-student respondents. On the AD dimension, both high school and college subjects ($\bar{X}$=37.5) differed significantly (F=7.5, df=2/41, p=.001) from the non-students subjects ($\bar{X}$=25); the high school and college age respondents saw the 19-year old to be more dependent than did the older non-students. For the dimension II, high school students ($\bar{X}$=38), again, differed significantly (F=9.3, df=2/41, p=.001) from non-students ($\bar{X}$=23); high school students saw the 19-year old to be more ineffective than the non-students saw him to be.

Forty-nine-year-old target. Differences were also found for the 49-year old target. For PAU, high school age respondents ($\bar{X}$=70) differed significantly (F=5.9, df=2/41, p=.001) from the non-students ($\bar{X}$=53). High school students saw the 49-year old to be more personally unacceptable than the non-students saw him to be. No significant differences among respondent groups on the dimensions AD (F=1.9, df=2/41, p=.15) and II (F=0.9, df=2/41, p=.40) were found.

Seventy-year-old target. For the target age 70, non-students ($\bar{X}$=58), differed significantly (F=3.8, df=2/40, p=.03) from high school students ($\bar{X}$=47) and college students ($\bar{X}$=43) on the PAU dimension. That is, the non-students

saw the 70-year old to be less personally acceptable than did the high school and college respondents. On the remaining scales, AD and II, no significant ($F=1.3$, $df=2/40$, $p=.28$; $F=1.4$, $df=2/40$, $p=.24$, respectively) differences were found.

Research Question Three

While questions one and two sought to discover attitudinal differences expressed by three different groups toward four different target ages, question three sought to discover if there were any significant differences in communicative behavior expressed by the three respondent groups. A two-way analysis of variance revealed that the number of words ($F=18$, $df=2/164$, $p=.001$) and the number of sentences and phrases ($F=13$, $df=2/164$, $p=.001$) yielded significant main effects.

Scheffe analysis revealed significant (.05 level) differences among the college ($\bar{X}=75$), high school ($\bar{X}=50$), and non-student ($\bar{X}=40$) groups on the number of words produced. College students delivered more words than either of the other respondent groups.

Scheffe analysis for the number of written sentences and phrases produced similar results. College students ($\bar{X}=5.9$) produced more sentences and phrases than the high school students ($\bar{X}=4.3$) or non-students ($\bar{X}=4.3$). Perhaps this is due to a greater verbal demand placed upon students in everyday college situations.

Research Question Four

The results of this research question found no significant differences in the communication behavior expressed toward each of the four target ages. The number of words and number of written sentences and phrases did not vary

when respondents communicated to the target pictures (F=1.4, df=3/164, p=.22; F=1.7, df=3/164, p=.16, respectively). Finally, no significant respondent group by target age interactions on the communication variables were produced.

Summary

For respondent age the following significant main effects were found: (1) high school Ss described aging as more personally unacceptable than non-student Ss; (2) high school Ss described aging as less autonomous than non-student Ss; (3) high school Ss described aging as more ineffective than non-students Ss; and, (4) college students produced more words and sentences than the other two respondent groups.

For target age the following main effects were found: (1) the 49-year old was described as less personally acceptable than the 12, 19 and 70-year olds; and, (2) the 70-year old was seen to be less autonomous than the 12-year old.

The following significant respondent by target age interactions were discovered on the PAU dimension: (1) high school and college respondents described the 19-year old target as more personally unacceptable than did older non-student respondents; (2) high school respondents described the 49-year old target as more personally unacceptable than non-student respondents; and, (3) high school and college respondents described the 70-year old target as less personally unacceptable than did non-student respondents.

The sole significant interaction on the AD dimension showed that high school and college respondents described the 19-year old target as more dependent than the non-student respondents.

The two significant interaction effects on the II dimension showed that:

(1) high school respondents described the 12-year old target as more ineffective than the non-student respondents; and, (2) high school respondents described the 19-year old target as more ineffective than the non-student respondents.

Discussion

This final section will discuss some of the more interesting findings and their implications for communication. By and large, Figure 1 summarizes the more graphic results (high scale values represent high levels of personal unacceptability, dependency and ineffectiveness, respectively; while, relatively low scale values suggest higher levels of personal acceptability, autonomy and instrumentality, respectively).

Rosencranz & McNevin (1969) believe the attributes tapped by their PAU dimension to be strongly related to levels of social interaction. Clearly, people are more likely to be attracted to and communicate with those whom they find personally acceptable. In this study, all respondents combined, felt the 49-year old target to be the most personally unacceptable. This finding seems to underscore the problems associated with intergenerational communication. All respondents in this study were roughly one generation younger (high school and college age) or one generation older (non-students) than this target. Thus, the 49-year old, who represents the parent role to the students, and the child role to the older non-students, is in the middle of the generation gap.

It is noteworthy that both college and high school students find the 70-year old most personally acceptable, while the non-students (grandparent age) find the 19-year old (student/grandchild age) most personally acceptable. This finding is consistent with others that demonstrate adolescents and young adults often prefer to communicate and confide in grandparents, because they

are less threatening than parents. Complementing this view, grandparents often feel relieved of the pressure to communicate defensive or disciplinary messages, and, can, therefore, develop a relationship with a younger family member. They are no longer thwarted by the demands of the parent role.

The tensions associated with the parent-child relationship help explain why the old non-students would find the 19-year old target more personally acceptable than the 49-year old target. Their preference for the 19-year old, over the 12-year old target, might be attributed to the difference in maturity that would make communication and interaction with a young adult more rewarding.

Image theory (Boulding, 1971) explains why the non-students found the 70-year old target least personally acceptable. The exposure to the stereotyped messages of aging over a lifetime take their toll on the self-image and self-esteem of elderly persons. Although these image threatening messages may be initially resisted, repetitive or authoritative messages can penetrate the resistance and alter the image. Certainly in a culture that glorifies youth, promotes mandatory retirement, and maintains the myths of ageism, the elderly do often receive such forceful and penetrating messages. Even early research in the field of gerontology itself did much to reinforce misconceptions. This was a result of the fact that most of these early studies were based on institutionalized older people who represent a scant minority among the aged. Since the older non-students have been exposed to these stereotyped perceptions for a longer period of time, it is little wonder that they have internalized these attitudes to the greatest extent.

The internalization of negative messages about aging by the old non-student respondents is abundantly evident across each of the attitudinal dimensions studied. For target ages 12, 19, and 49, the nonstudents express the most positive attitude. This pattern is dramatically reversed for the

70-year old target, where the most negative attitude is consistently expressed. Thus, it is amply clear that the oldest sample in this study held the most stereotyped attitudes toward the aged.

Finally, the inability to replicate differences in communication behavior expressed toward the target ages may be attributed to the use of a written communication measurement instead of the oral measurement used by Rubin & Brown (1975). The major advantage of a written measurement is the elimination of transcribing the taped conversations of an oral session. On the other hand, written communication apprehension may well have affected responses to the life span target ages. In such a case, an oral procedure would prove to be more fruitful in assessing the effects of attitudes toward aging on communication behavior.

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